United Nations E/AC.51/2015/4

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 March 2015

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Fifty-fifth session
Substantive session, 1-26 June 2015
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Evaluation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Executive summary

The present evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) sought to assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in relation to its objectives. OIOS focused on the role of the Conference's research and analysis pillar in contributing to overall programme performance.

The research and analysis products generated by UNCTAD during the period under review were generally of good quality. In addition, a wide variety of stakeholders recognize the organization for its relevance as a champion of sustainable development from a developing country perspective; this broad institutional relevance is clearly reflected in its research and analysis products. The broadly positive institutional assessment notwithstanding, individual research and analysis products varied both in their quality and relevance. The variability could be rooted in uneven quality assurance mechanisms and work planning methods — an unevenness that might also account for the sometimes contradictory messages across its various publications and for the variable degree to which those publications integrate gender.

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Similarly, UNCTAD produced a large volume of research and analysis products while containing costs, suggesting a degree of efficiency at a broad institutional level. At a project-specific level, however, the Conference's resource constraints have not prompted it to streamline its research and analysis work programme by strategically identifying those products most relevant to current needs or most conducive to reaching the organization's objectives in the most efficient way possible.

At a more fundamental level, inadequate attention to dissemination has hampered the ability of UNCTAD to attain broader reach and results and its lack of investment in monitoring and evaluation has limited its ability to measure such results.

OIOS makes seven recommendations, all of which it deems important according to its criticality rating system. These are that UNCTAD should:

(a) Continue to strengthen its overall institutional orientation towards results;

(b) Revisit and, where necessary, revise its current research and analysis product typology;

(c) Develop and implement quality assurance frameworks for its research and analysis products;

(d) Reinvigorate its Publications Committee and strengthen its remit;

(e) Strengthen dissemination;

(f) Reinforce its gender mainstreaming effort;

(g) Dedicate focused attention and resources to monitoring and evaluation.

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I. Introduction

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) selected the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected this evaluation for consideration at its fifty-fifth session in 2015 (see A/68/16, para. 158). The General Assembly endorsed the selection in paragraph 5 of its resolution 68/20.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS evaluation is provided in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, which define the purpose of evaluation as: (a) determining, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to its objectives; and (b) enabling the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection on increasing organizational effectiveness (see ST/SGB/2000/8, Regulation 7.1). The present evaluation has been prepared in conformance with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group. The comments of UNCTAD management were sought on the draft report and were taken into account in the preparation of the final report. The final comments of UNCTAD are set out in the annex.

II. Background

A. Mandate, organization, governance and resources

3. The General Assembly established the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1964 (see resolution 1995 (XIX). UNCTAD comprises its 194 member States and the Geneva-based secretariat that supports them. The present evaluation focuses on the UNCTAD secretariat (hereafter referred to as UNCTAD). Every four years, UNCTAD integrates the outcome of the quadrennial conference (see para. 8 below) into its strategic framework (see A/69/6 (Prog. 10), paras 10 and 11). UNCTAD is the focal point in the United Nations system for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development.

4. Pursuant to its mandate, the main objective of UNCTAD is to assist developing countries, especially the least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition in integrating beneficially into the global economy in support of sustainable growth and development (see A/67/6 (Prog. 10)). Towards that end, the work of UNCTAD revolves around three pillars:

(a) Consensus-building, within which UNCTAD contributes substantive expertise to support intergovernmental processes;

(b) Research and analysis, through which UNCTAD aims to enhance understanding of the issues relevant to its mandate among a wide range of stakeholders, intergovernmental and otherwise;

(c) Technical cooperation, through which UNCTAD aims to help to strengthen the capacity of countries for inclusive, sustainable integration into the global economy.

5. In undertaking its programme of work, UNCTAD is organized into five subprogrammes, namely:

- Subprogramme 1: Globalization, interdependence and development
- Subprogramme 2: Investment and enterprise
- Subprogramme 3: International trade and commodities[1]
- Subprogramme 4: Technology and logistics
- Subprogramme 5: Africa, least developed countries and special programmes.

The structural arrangements of UNCTAD are directly aligned with these five subprogrammes and all five contribute substantially to outputs in all three pillars. As at 2014-2015, UNCTAD comprised 405 Geneva-based staff (385 regular budget and 20 extrabudgetary),[2] a net decrease of 16 staff compared with the previous biennium.

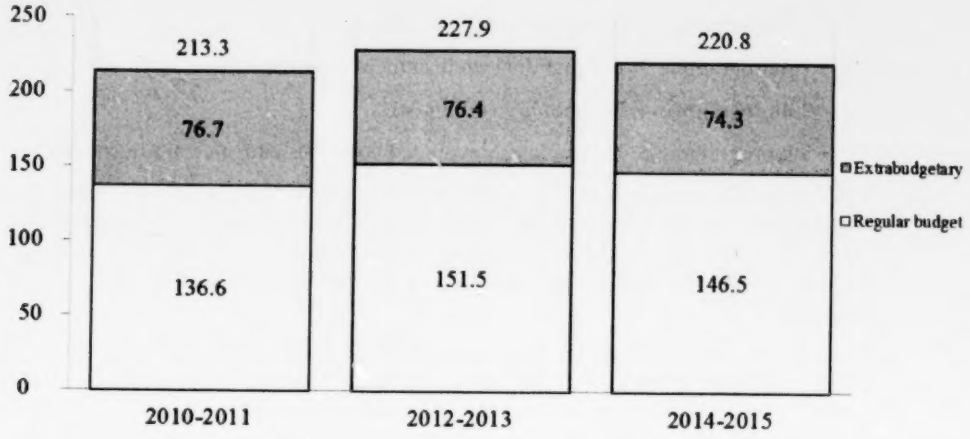
6. For the purposes of the present evaluation, OIOS developed a programme impact pathway summarizing the underlying programme logic of UNCTAD. Rooted in the Conference's strategic frameworks and in consultations with UNCTAD management, the programme impact pathway represents a visual road map conveying how UNCTAD aims to fulfil its mandate and achieve its objectives.

7. Figure 1 below summarizes the UNCTAD budget trends for the period 2010-2015. With an average biennial budget of $221 million, UNCTAD receives two thirds of its funding through regular budget sources (an average of 65.7 per cent every biennium since 2010-2011), the vast majority of which constitutes posts. The costs of the Conference's outputs in consensus-building and research and analysis largely constitute staff time, with little discretionary non-post funding. The outputs of the technical cooperation pillar are funded almost entirely by extrabudgetary sources, with the exception of the regular budget resources associated with staff time and administrative support to these heavily consultancy-based interventions.

[1] Subprogramme 3 is subdivided into two components: strengthening international trade, and commodities.

[2] Extrabudgetary staff, not including temporary experts recruited to undertake technical cooperation projects.

Figure 1
Financial resources of UNCTAD, 2010-2015
(Millions of United States dollars)



Source: proposed programme budgets for UNCTAD. See A/64/6 (Sect. 12), A/66/6 (Sect. 12), A/68/6 (Sect. 12).

8. The highest decision-making body of UNCTAD is the quadrennial conference, a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, at which member States make assessments of current trade and development issues, discuss policy options and formulate global policy responses. The conference sets the mandate and work priorities of the UNCTAD secretariat. The last ministerial conference was held in Doha in April 2012 in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. Member States adopted the Doha Mandate reaffirming the role of UNCTAD as the United Nations focal point for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development (see UNCTAD/ISS/2012/1). The Executive Head of the UNCTAD secretariat serves as Secretary-General of the Conference.

9. As a United Nations Secretariat programme, the UNCTAD secretariat is bound by Secretariat rules and regulations, reporting to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly on the use of its regular budget resources. UNCTAD also reports to its own separate governing body, the Trade and Development Board, established as a permanent subsidiary organ of the Conference to carry out its work between quadrennial sessions. The Trade and Development Board oversees the activities of UNCTAD and discusses emerging issues.

B. Evaluation framework: scope, purpose and methodology

Scope and purpose

10. The present evaluation sought to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of UNCTAD in relation to its objectives during the period 2010-2014. In its previous assessment, OIOS focused on the contribution of the research and analysis pillar to the overall programme performance of UNCTAD. OIOS adopted this approach based on the high-risk

profile of the research and analysis pillar: research and analysis outputs are among the most tangible and visible products of UNCTAD and represent a significant (45.2 per cent)[3] proportion of its outputs; they require a significant investment of staff resources in all five subprogrammes.

Methodology

11. OIOS gathered evidence using a wide range of methods, including:

(a) Desk review of 320 documents, including an external independent assessment of the most recent flagship reports (hereafter referred to as "flagships")[4] and a formal meta-evaluation of 20 evaluations produced from 2010 to 2014;[5]

(b) Multiple regression analysis of the quality, utilization and cost of research and analysis outputs based on a stratified random sample of 261 such outputs produced from 2010 to 2014.[6] This enabled statistically valid inferences about the entire population of 1,101 research and analysis outputs[7] produced during this period;[8]

(c) Global media scan and bibliometric analysis to assess coverage of UNCTAD in 48 scholarly and policy journals[9] and the global media;[10]

(d) Semi-structured interviews (28) and focus groups (13 comprised of 85 individuals) with UNCTAD staff, UNCTAD partners and member States;

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[3] Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System data, 2012-2013.

[4] The independent assessment included 10 flagships. Eight are regular UNCTAD flagships. In addition, the assessment included two consecutive years for the *World Investment Report* and the *Trade and Development Report*. It entailed a descriptive comparison (for example, target audience, policy recommendations and overall messages) in addition to an interpretive professional assessment (for example, value-add when compared with similar publications, rating of quality and use or intended use). It also included an assessment of intra- and inter-document coherence on the following topics: effects of foreign direct investment on development, transnational corporations, debt-financed public spending, global value chains, international investment agreements and role of the development state.

[5] The 20 evaluations included 5 mandated by the Trade and Development Board, 13 project evaluations and 2 programme evaluations. OIOS deemed 11 of the 20 evaluations to be of good or excellent quality.

[6] Inferences from this sample can be drawn to the entire universe of research and analysis outputs except for public presentations. OIOS also requisitioned a sub-sample of UNCTAD presentations, but not all of these were available.

[7] The population comprised 248 recurrent publications, 236 non-recurrent publications and 617 "other substantive activities", according to the Conference's official Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System categorization. Recurrent publications included flagship publications and non-flagships such as analytical series and reviews. Non-recurrent publications included, among others, discussion papers and technical papers. Other substantive activities included parliamentary documentation training material and other instrumental outputs.

[8] This included ordinary least squares, and multinomial and logit/probit regression. OIOS collected self-reported UNCTAD data on, for example, output production, dissemination and costs. OIOS also engaged a panel of six independent expert economists (henceforth "expert reviewers") to independently assess these outputs.

[9] Namely, 8 journals recommended by the expert reviewers and 40 journals suggested by UNCTAD.

[10] OIOS analysed references made to UNCTAD in a random sample of 303 news articles (from a universe of 1,401) in English, French and Spanish from high-readership media based on a percentile ranking of readership for a specific month. For example, "91-100" represents the most highly trafficked publications for the month.

(e) Self-administered web-based surveys of 330 staff[11] and 38 "thought leaders";[12]

(f) Direct observation of intergovernmental meetings and external events (2).

12. The evaluation's key limitations centred on data gaps, including low response rates in select data collection modalities,[13] reliance on self-reported data provided by UNCTAD (for example, for cost data) and unavailable data.[14] In addition, OIOS had planned a series of case studies[15] to reach out to policymakers, the Conference's main audience, but the cooperation rate among these stakeholders was very low, rendering the data unusable.[16] The main ramification of these data gaps was that OIOS was unable to benefit from a larger base of information, for example, perceptual information on the perspectives of key stakeholder groups or documentary information on key issues. Moreover, the inability to carry out the case studies limited the ability of OIOS to adequately explore the linkages among the three pillars of UNCTAD.

13. Further background information on UNCTAD and on the scope, objectives and purposes, and methods of the present evaluation was detailed in an inception paper developed by OIOS at the outset of the present evaluation.[17]

[11] The staff survey yielded a response rate of 52 per cent (61 per cent at the P-level and above).

[12] A "thought leader" is an individual recognized as an expert authority in a given substantive area. The Inspection and Evaluation Division drew up an initial list of 116 individuals from top international economic policy think tanks as identified in the *2013 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*. Through a "snowball" sample (also known as "chain" or "referral" sampling), 36 additional thought leaders were identified. The survey was administered only to those individuals who agreed in advance to participate. This comprised 10 female and 28 male experts in five geographic regions.

[13] A civil society survey, for example, based on a list provided by UNCTAD, yielded a response rate of 4 per cent.

[14] UNCTAD was unable to provide 61 of the sampled research and analysis products of OIOS. In addition, OIOS encountered cases where individual outputs lacked data on specific variables. To address this gap, OIOS used multiple imputation methods to ensure the robustness of multivariate analyses.

[15] The case studies selected through a systematic process were: the Debt Management and Financial Analysis Systems (research and analysis and technical cooperation); services policy reviews (research and analysis and technical cooperation); Investment, Enterprise and Development Commission (research and analysis and consensus-building); and Expert Meeting on Transport and Trade Facilitation (research and analysis and consensus-building).

[16] Based on contact lists provided by UNCTAD, OIOS contacted 19 external stakeholders. Only one responded to its questions.

[17] OIOS, inception paper IED-14-009, available from https://iseek-newyork.un.org/webpgdept617_49.

III. Evaluation results

A. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has generated a wide array of research and analysis products of generally good quality, but the effects of these products are largely unknown, since the organization has seldom tracked the results of its work

UNCTAD products are of variable, but generally good, quality

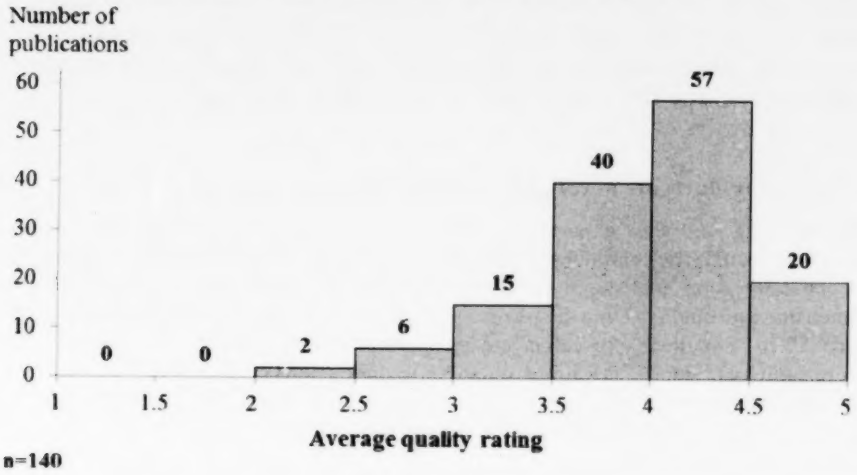
14. Relying on the expert reviewers, complemented by information from interviews, OIOS determined the research and analysis products of UNCTAD to be of generally good quality. OIOS expert reviewers assessed 140 products[18] on nine dimensions of quality. On a five-point scale with "1" corresponding to "very poor" and "5" to "excellent", research and analysis products received an average index score rating of "good".[19] Ratings on specific dimensions varied, with credibility of authorship and credibility of sources receiving high ratings and strategic use of graphics, balance and succinctness receiving lower ratings.

15. Figure 2 below illustrates this positive overall assessment. Although product quality varied, average quality ratings tended to converge towards the higher end of the quality scale. A majority of research and analysis products (83.6 per cent) received an average quality rating of "good" to "excellent". No product was rated as "poor" to "very poor" across all nine dimensions and only eight publications (5.7 per cent) received an average rating of "poor" or lower. Four publications stood out with a grading of "excellent" across all nine dimensions of quality.

[18] These included: flagships, policy reviews, technical notes, studies, series, discussion papers, policy briefs and presentations. It also included a handful of technical cooperation outputs, such as policy reviews. The quality assessment was carried out only on those outputs (140) where the nine dimensions were relevant.

[19] Mean = 4.0, median = 4.0, n = 140. Through factor analysis, OIOS summarized the scores of individual products across all nine dimensions into a single summary index score signifying overall quality.

Figure 2
Average quality ratings of sampled research and analysis products



Note: Scale ranged from 1-5; 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = fair, 4 = good, 5 = excellent. Rating represents the average score a given product received across nine quality dimensions. Average scores were not always whole numbers.
Source: Office of Internal Oversight Services.

16. Interviewed stakeholders, including interviewed external stakeholders, corroborated this positive assessment, as did the independent flagship assessment by OIOS, which rated one report as "excellent", eight as "good" and one as "fair". (See figure 4 below.) Moreover, 30 of the 38 thought leaders aware of the work of UNCTAD (78.9 per cent) judged this work favourably in overarching, non-product-specific terms on two dimensions of quality (clarity and balance), although less favourably on succinctness. When compared with similar documents produced by other actors, 32.4 per cent of UNCTAD products were judged by experts to be of "somewhat higher" or "much higher" quality, 40.8 per cent were considered to be of "about the same" quality as similar publications and 26.7 per cent were considered to be of "somewhat lower" or "much lower" quality.[20]

Variation in quality rooted in uneven quality assurance mechanisms

17. Through multiple regression analysis, OIOS identified one main factor to be a particularly strong driver of perceived quality: experts were more likely to assess an output of high quality when it seemed "ahead of the curve" in anticipating and addressing emerging issues rather than reacting to them. In the qualitative feedback from expert reviewers, the most frequently cited recommendation for improving the quality of the Conference's research and analysis products is that these products make policy recommendations more specific, better supplement narratives with graphics and shorten overall length wherever possible.[21]

[20] This sub-sample was lower (n = 71), since experts were not always familiar with a similar document on the topic.

[21] In an open-ended question, experts were requested to provide general recommendations to improve the quality of the research and analysis document being reviewed.

18. Beyond the overall favourable ratings of quality for research and analysis products, in its desk review and interviews, OIOS determined UNCTAD quality assurance mechanisms to be uneven and unclear. No corporate document exists outlining what quality assurance entails as specifically applied to UNCTAD publications and statistical databases. Moreover, in practice, major quality assurance hallmarks (peer reviews of research and analysis products, open public access for statistical databases) are implemented at the discretion of each division.[22] OIOS noted initial steps by UNCTAD to develop an institutional approach to quality assurance in its stated intention of preparing common guidelines to facilitate the peer review process.[23] OIOS was also informed of preliminary discussions for the development of a quality assurance framework for its statistics databases. Both of these initiatives remain works in progress.

Insufficient attention to measurement of the use and effects of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development products

19. To be effective, UNCTAD research and analysis products must first reach their intended audiences and be read, be considered of high quality (and therefore credible) and be used and applied. OIOS acknowledges that documenting, measuring and analysing these sequential steps in the path to effectiveness is challenging. Such measures are necessary, however, if UNCTAD is to know whether and what its work has concretely achieved. Information on target audiences, for example, policymakers, academics and international organizations, and on research and analysis products' influence on and effectiveness for these audiences, is scarce.

20. In the period under evaluation, UNCTAD strengthened its evaluation function and, more recently, put in place components for improving its approach to results-based management. In 2011, it approved an evaluation policy establishing general evaluation standards, outlining guiding principles and norms and defining roles and responsibilities. It has largely achieved sufficient evaluation coverage of its technical cooperation activities. More broadly, UNCTAD has taken steps to become more results-oriented. It developed a results-based framework in 2013 and established a results-based management coordinating group in 2014. The Conference's investment in the evaluation function is slightly higher than the United Nations Secretariat average, although this average has been noted as being low.[24]

21. In contrast to technical cooperation, the UNCTAD research and analysis pillar, despite its centrality to the Conference's work, has not received sufficient evaluation coverage. Of the 20 evaluations reviewed by OIOS, only 5 covered elements of the research and analysis pillar in any way and none focused exclusively on the Conference's research and analysis work. Indeed, 63.2 per cent of surveyed staff believe that UNCTAD does not have the tools to measure the use of its research and analysis products. However, evaluation coverage of research and analysis is slowly improving, with the introduction in 2013 of the mandate to evaluate the contribution of each of its five strategic programmes to relevance, effectiveness and efficiency along all three pillars, including research and analysis. By the end of 2014, UNCTAD had evaluated strategic programmes 1 and 2.

[22] With the exception of flagships, for which an internal and external peer review is mandatory.

[23] UNCTAD, Revised Policy Clearing Process, December 2014.

[24] Namely, 0.58 per cent of its 2010-2011 budget, compared with a Secretariat average of 0.29 per cent. See A/68/70.

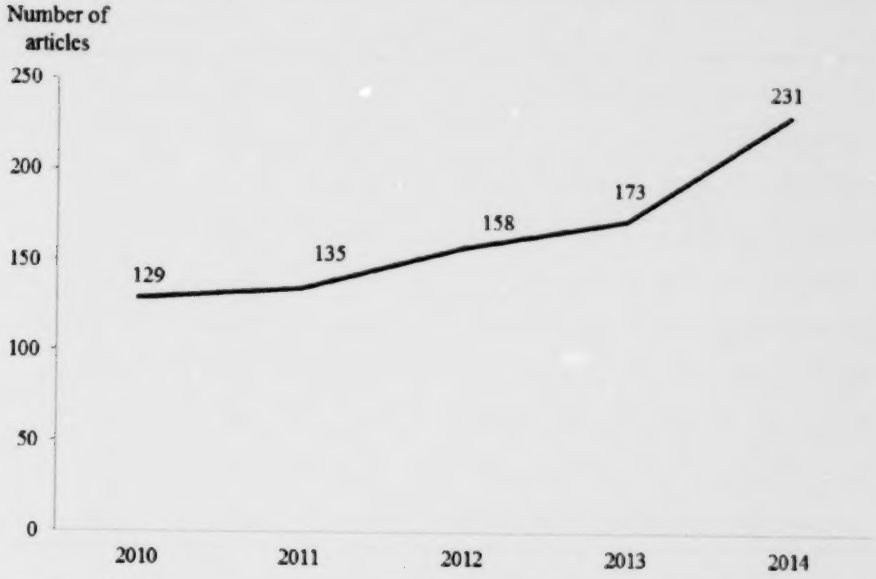
22. Apart from the few existing evaluations addressing the research and analysis pillar, there is a dearth of organization-wide information on the contribution to outcomes of the Conference's research and analysis products, even those products prepared annually. UNCTAD has tried to improve its understanding of who reads its flagships through a readership survey, but the number of total responses has been too low to provide usable information. Internal monitoring and evaluation coverage is uneven and contingent on the priorities set by each division. One division, for example, actively encourages staff to systematically document any feedback on the use of products by stakeholders and has introduced innovative approaches to better understand who interacts with its content. This usage data is included in an annual impact report. For the most part, however, monitoring in UNCTAD is limited to self-assessments in the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System.

Evidence of the use of research and analysis products, a prerequisite for effectiveness, limited to select audiences

23. The sources of evidence for drawing conclusions on the use and effectiveness of the Conference's research and analysis products by different target audiences are limited. OIOS gathered data on product use from the Conference's evaluations, selected interviews, a thought leader survey, an expert review, a media scan and a bibliometric analysis. These methods yielded an approximation of use by individuals in universities, think tanks, international organizations and popular media. OIOS was unable, however, to gather usage data by government counterparts, including policymakers — one of the Conference's main target audiences (see para. 12 above).

24. In academic circles, the Conference's research and analysis products are used for both teaching and research: 80.6 per cent of thought leaders claimed to have cited the Conference's work in their own publications and 56.7 per cent to have used its work as required or recommended reading in their course bibliographies. As a proxy of use, expert reviewers were asked whether, upon reviewing it, they would consider using the UNCTAD product at hand for teaching or research. By this measure, over half of products (55 per cent) merited use in experts' teaching and just under half (45.1 per cent) in their future research. In the independent assessment of flagships summarized in figure 4 below, the expert had used 4 of the 10 flagships previously and would do so again; subsequent to his review, however, he would also consider using four additional flagships. UNCTAD also has a presence in scholarly and policy journals, as figure 3 below illustrates. Among the 48 economics, trade, business and development journals scanned by OIOS, citations of the Conference's research and analysis have grown steadily over five years.

Figure 3
Number of articles referring to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in sample of 48 scholarly and policy journals, 2010-2014



Source: Office of Internal Oversight Services.

25. In the OIOS focused review of the Conference's flagships, two categories emerged (see figure 4 below).The first group, comprising the topically broad *Trade and Development Report* and the *World Investment Report*, was deemed to be of "good" quality. Moreover, both of these flagships were well-known and used by expert reviewers. This recognition and use extended to thought leaders, a majority of whom had read at least part of the *Trade and Development Report* (64.8 per cent) and the *World Investment Report* (69.4 per cent).The second category, consisting of the remaining six flagships, is confined to niche audiences. Ranging in quality from "fair" to "excellent", none of these had been used by the expert reviewing them. Similarly, only a fraction of thought leaders had read a section of these reports.[25]

[25] Percentage of thought leaders having read the following flagships: *Review of Marine Transport* — 14.7; *Information Economy Report* — 20.6; *Technology and Innovation Report*, 23.5; *Economic Development in Africa Report* — 26.5; *Least Developed Countries Report* — 37.1; *Trade and Environment Review* — 38.2.

Figure 4
Summary of the external review of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development flagship publications

	Quality	*Have you used it?*	*Would you use it in the future?*
World Investment Report (2013)	Good	Yes	Yes
World Investment Report (2014)	Good	Yes	Yes
Trade and Development Report (2013)	Good	Yes	Yes
Trade and Development Report (2014)	Good	Yes	Yes
Information Economy Report (2013)	Good	No	No
Trade and Environment Review (2013)	Good	No	Yes
Review of Maritime Transport (2013)	Excellent	No	Yes
Technology and Innovation Report (2012)	Fair	No	No
Least Developed Countries Report (2013)	Good	No	Yes
Economic Development in Africa (2014)	Good	No	Yes

26. The analysis by OIOS, while offering a provisional sense of the use and effectiveness of UNCTAD research and analysis products, merely provides proxy measures. Such measures are no substitute for ongoing attention to systematically monitoring and evaluating their quality, use and ultimate effectiveness in enhancing knowledge and understanding and informing decisions (see paras. 21 and 22 above).

B. The overall organizational relevance of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is recognized, but its approach to prioritizing its research and analysis workplan has been uneven, undermining its ability to ensure consistently high value-add across its full product line

Overall organizational relevance recognized

27. Interviewed member States recognized the unique relevance of UNCTAD as a champion of sustainable development from a developing country perspective. This sentiment echoes self-perceptions of UNCTAD staff. In interviews, all staff and almost all external stakeholders positively assess the relevance of UNCTAD and agree that it has a place among other actors with a similar focus. The relevance of UNCTAD as a think tank is acknowledged by thought leaders familiar but unassociated with the organization. In this group, 87.1 per cent agree strongly or somewhat that UNCTAD delivers clear value-add compared with other actors producing similar work. In addition, all consider the Conference's research and analysis on trade policies and market access to be somewhat or highly relevant.

28. This dedication to developing country needs is reflected in the Conference's research and analysis products. OIOS expert reviewers verified that a majority of products sampled embody an explicit (53 per cent) or implicit (32.4 per cent) focus on developing countries. Moreover, in its regression analysis, OIOS determined that the extent to which UNCTAD products focus on the specific challenges faced by the least developed countries was a strong positive predictor prompting reviewers — themselves topical experts — to think differently about the subject at hand.

Value-add of specific products mixed

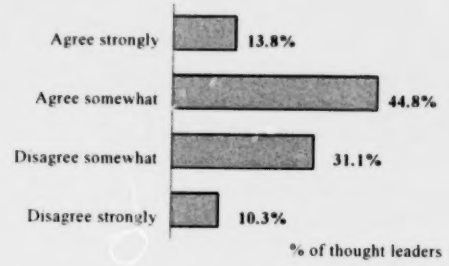
29. Beyond these perceptions of the overall organizational relevance of UNCTAD, feedback on the relevance of its many specific research and analysis products varied. As an overarching product line, the Conference's statistical products received the highest value-add ratings. When asked to provide a concrete example of a valuable UNCTAD product, 78.9 per cent of thought leaders mentioned databases, namely, the Foreign Direct Investment database or the Trade Analysis and Information System database. Similarly, in interviews, the Conference's external stakeholders from the United Nations regional commissions, member States and other international organizations cite the UNCTADStat statistics portal, Foreign Direct Investment databases and the *UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics* as being of particularly high value-add. Among the Conference's other products, the *World Investment Report* was the single most frequently cited product in external stakeholder interviews. A 2014 evaluation of subprogramme 2 underlines the positive perceptions of this flagship and of the *Investment Policy Framework for Sustainable Development*. Similarly, a 2013 evaluation of subprogramme 1 points to the *Trade and Development Report* and the annual report of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on debt sustainability and development as particularly high-value-add products.

30. One indication of the value-add of UNCTAD products is the extent to which they are perceived to be "ahead of the curve" in anticipating emerging issues, not least of all among external observers familiar with trade and development economics. UNCTAD has itself used this phrase to describe its aspirations for the research and analysis pillar. By this measure, thought leaders' overall perceptions of UNCTAD and experts' assessments of specific products, summarized in figure 5 below, were mixed. While over half (58.6 per cent) of thought leaders agreed strongly or somewhat that the Conference's research and analysis work is generally far or somewhat ahead of the curve, 41.4 per cent disagreed. Expert reviewers rated 41.7 per cent of specific products "ahead of the curve" and 51.8 per cent "about on the curve". Expert reviewers suggested that some outputs were not ahead of or on the curve because they were too descriptive, added little to the debate or missed an important issue.

Figure 5

Summary of feedback from thought leaders and expert reviewers on the value-add of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

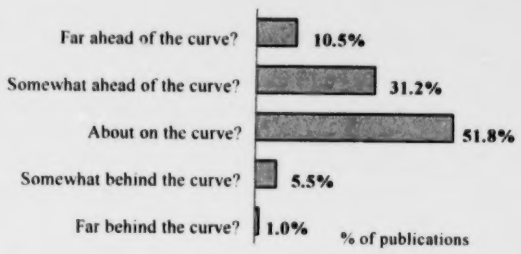
Thought leader feedback on research and analysis products generally
"How strongly would you agree that the research and analysis work of UNCTAD is 'ahead of the curve' in identifying and exploring new and emerging issues?"



n=29
Note: mean = 2.62, median = 3, on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = agree somewhat, 4 = agree strongly.

Source: Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Expert reviewer feedback on specific research and analysis products
"How would you characterize this UNCTAD document in terms of its relation to current debates at the time of its publication? Would you say it was ..."



n=199
Note: mean = 0.45, median = 0, on a scale where -2 = far behind the curve, -1 = somewhat behind the curve, 0 = about on the curve, 1 = somewhat ahead of the curve, 2 = far ahead of the curve.

Uncoordinated approach to work planning and output production

31. As with its quality assurance mechanisms, the Conference's approach to work planning and the actual production of outputs is uncoordinated. The quadrennial conference provides UNCTAD with general guidelines on the issue areas that should be addressed in its research and analysis work. This mandate is broad, however, and accords UNCTAD flexibility in determining the specific topics and themes it will pursue.[26] From division-level focus groups and the staff survey, OIOS established that work planning, including the identification of research and analysis topics, occurs predominantly within each division, with low interdivisional collaboration. Although all five divisions use similar methods to determine their research topics (for example, divisional retreats, internal brainstorming sessions and participation in conferences), only one cited consultations with other divisions as constituting part of its work planning process.

32. Uncoordinated work planning deprives divisions spearheading the development of a given product of the benefit of the collective intellectual capital of other divisions through critical discussions, at a very early stage, in a manner consistent with the Conference's self-described identity as a think tank. It also denies management the opportunity to review the relative relevance of planned outputs through the lens of the Conference's strategic institutional priorities (see paras. 30 and 31 above).

33. Lastly, the Conference's uncoordinated approach to work planning also makes it difficult to identify whether and when the messages contained in its various publications are contradictory or might be perceived as such. Roughly half of individuals interviewed (UNCTAD staff, member States and partners) maintained that

[26] In interviews, senior staff noted that UNCTAD is currently in negotiations with the Publication Board on its publication programme, with possible effects on the Conference's ability to plan and publish relevant research and analysis products.

there is a lack of coherence in the messages and recommendations appearing in UNCTAD products, most notably its flagships, and that this lack of coherence is detrimental to the Conference's potential. The other half of interviewees maintained that a lack of coherence was non-existent or greatly exaggerated or that having contending positions is healthy in an intellectual organization. The OIOS assessment of the flagships concluded that the *Trade and Development Report* and the *World Investment Report* are both globally recognized reports of good or excellent quality and influential in the academic community. However, the assessment also noted that the reports differ from each other so greatly, both in tone and messages, that they appear to be products generated by different organizations.

34. As with work planning, the Conference's production of outputs occurs within the confines of each division. Four of the five evaluations commissioned by the Trade and Development Board since 2010 underline this lack of interdivisional collaboration. Moreover, 69.4 per cent (77.8 per cent for staff P-5 and above) of staff surveyed still consider UNCTAD to be somewhat or highly inefficient at working across divisions in the production of its outputs. As an example, in interviews, staff pointed to divisions being reluctant to share their databases. Indeed, only 20.3 per cent of the research and analysis products reviewed were marked by interdivisional collaboration.[27] According to interviewed staff, most collaboration occurs informally, based on personal relationships. Surveyed staff also noted on an open-ended basis that collaboration was not systematically recognized as an element of their workplan and that they would welcome greater opportunities for interdivisional mobility.[28]

35. Notwithstanding the above, OIOS notes that there have been recent attempts to instil mechanisms for promoting interdivisional collaboration that are better institutionalized and less ad hoc. The most prominent measures advanced include the implementation of divisional compacts (setting targets for interdivisional collaboration), the Communications Group, the Project Review Committee, the Publications Committee (see paras. 36 and 37 below) and an enhanced peer review process (see para. 18 above). Further efforts in this area include the launch of a new UNCTAD intranet in June 2014 and the adoption of a common format for work programmes for all divisions.

36. UNCTAD has put in place some initial elements to improve coordination in its work planning, most notably the reactivation of the interdivisional Publications Committee.[29] The Committee is meant to bring together senior management from all five divisions to discuss the Conference's publication programme and flagship topics. The recently revised policy clearance process (2014) also establishes the requirement that all flagships, in order to be approved by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, prepare a plan to be discussed in the Publications Committee.[30]

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[27] The OIOS regression analysis indicated that products developed through interdivisional collaboration were much more likely than other products to elicit new thinking among expert reviewers.

[28] The second most frequently mentioned recommendation for improving interdivisional collaboration is to formally recognize this collaboration within workplans.

[29] The Committee met twice in 2013 and four times in 2014. All divisions were represented in five of six meetings. Attendance by division directors themselves, however, has been inconsistent. In no meeting were all five directors present and in four meetings only one or two were present.

[30] The plan includes addressing the following elements: approach, methodology, objectives, expected content, policy messages, treatment of cross-cutting issues, target readership, dissemination, production schedule and plan for interdivisional peer reviews.

C. Despite efforts to improve its efficiency in a constrained resource environment, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has not fully harnessed its human or financial resources for maximum results

High product volume at largely internalized cost

37. From 2010 to 2014, UNCTAD produced a high volume of research and analysis products while containing costs. It generated 1,101 products in 2010-2013, namely, 248 recurrent publications, 236 non-recurrent publications and 617 other substantive activities. The flagships had median production costs of $345,140 and a mean of $795,302. For all other sampled research and analysis products, median production costs were $19,090 and had a mean of $57,575.[31]

38. To maximize efficiency, UNCTAD has internalized most of its costs, relying primarily on staff to produce its products. Staff time constituted the main production cost across all reviewed outputs.[32] On average, consultant fees made up only a relatively small proportion of product budgets.[33] Editing is also conducted largely internally, with 75 per cent of products edited in-house. To minimize shipping costs associated with hardcopy outputs, UNCTAD staff reported taking advantage of country visits to disseminate research and analysis products. (OIOS was unable to independently document the frequency of this practice.) Accordingly, 69.7 per cent of staff consider UNCTAD to be cost-effective. The evaluations of subprogrammes 1 and 2 further highlighted that both divisions were delivering on their work programme with limited resources.

No relationship between cost and quality, further underlining the variable value-for-money of outputs

39. Underneath this organizational pattern of high volume produced using almost entirely internalized costs, the value-for-money of the Conference's specific research and analysis products varies considerably. As indicated in paragraph 14 above, research and analysis outputs were rated as being of good quality on average. There was some variation from this general pattern, however, and while some outputs were of good quality on average across the various dimensions of quality, their scores on individual quality dimensions often varied considerably (see figure 6 below). UNCTAD is producing a number (23.4 per cent) of products of good to excellent quality at relatively modest cost (quadrant A) and others of similar quality (28.9 per cent) at relatively higher cost (quadrant B). By contrast, it is also producing a number (26.6 per cent) of somewhat lower-quality products, some at relatively modest cost (quadrant C), but others (21.1 per cent) at relatively higher cost.[34] The OIOS regression analysis corroborated the information conveyed graphically in figure 6, concluding that there is no relationship between the costs

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[31] Rough estimates are based on self-reported cost data. Production cost per product was calculated by adding monetized staff time, consultant fees and other production and dissemination costs.

[32] In 2014-2015, 90 per cent of its regular budget corresponded to staff posts. Consultants were used for 27.3 per cent of products on which data on budget was provided.

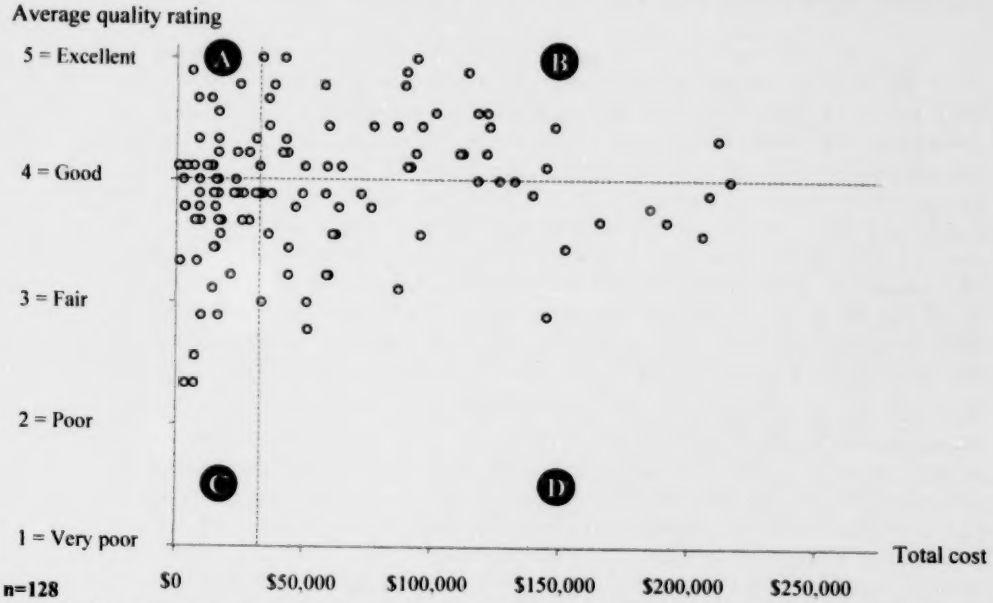
[33] Mean = 13 per cent, median = 21.8 per cent, n = 97.

[34] Figure 4 does not provide evidence of the effectiveness of these outputs, irrespective of quality or cost (see paras. 19-27).

that the Conference's research and analysis products incur and the quality they attain.

Figure 6

Quality and cost of sampled United Nations Conference on Trade and Development research and analysis outputs, 2010-2014[35]



Note: Quality rating represents the average score a given product received across nine quality dimensions. Average scores were not always whole numbers. Horizontal and vertical intersects indicated at median for each axis. Average quality rating has median of 4.0 and mean of 3.94. Total cost has median of $35,000 and mean of $56,000.
Source: Office of Internal Oversight Services.

40. In a move to help UNCTAD to become more uniformly efficient, the Conference was instructed, in the 2008 Accra Accord, to streamline its publications programme. UNCTAD cut the number of its recurrent and non-recurrent publications by 22.6 per cent (from 286 to 211) between 2008-2009 and 2014-2015. However, in interviews, staff explained that this streamlining process had been carried out in a mechanical, decentralized manner, with each division required to cut its overall number of research and analysis products by a certain percentage. This mechanical and uncoordinated approach deprived UNCTAD of the opportunity to jointly assess, at an institutional level, its higher- and lower-cost, higher- and lower-quality, higher- and lower-use and higher- and lower-effectiveness products side by side in order to make strategic, results-based and data-driven decisions (see paras. 32-34 above). Lacking more results-focused work planning, at present, UNCTAD is unequipped to critically and systematically self-examine how it will ensure that

[35] For display purposes, the graph excludes three outliers with large budgets, all of which received an average quality rating of good to excellent: *World Investment Report 2010* ($1.6 million, 3.9), *World Investment Report 2012* ($1.9 million, 5.0), *Least Developed Countries Report 2013* ($0.7 million, 4.0).

fewer of its outputs fall into quadrants C and especially D of figure 6 and that more fall into quadrants A and B.

D. A lack of attention to dissemination has limited the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development research and analysis products

41. In order for research and analysis products such as those produced by UNCTAD to be maximally effective, they must not only be of high quality; they must also reach their intended audiences. OIOS, notwithstanding challenges in its outreach to policymakers (see para. 12 above) determined that UNCTAD research and analysis products were falling short on this count. For example, although most thought leaders are well aware of two UNCTAD flagships, the *World Investment Report* and the *Trade and Development Report*, its remaining flagship publications are less well known (see para. 26 above). Even among the expert reviewers, 91.5 per cent of UNCTAD products were unfamiliar to them prior to the evaluation by OIOS. Moreover, the media scan by OIOS of high-readership newspapers in three languages showed that except for the two flagships mentioned above, individual UNCTAD products are not consistently detected by the media.[36]

42. One factor underpinning this low familiarity is the lack of a dedicated dissemination function (see TD/B/56/9/Rev.1) and, more importantly, dissemination strategy, as well as a lack of dedicated human or financial resources allocated to dissemination. Of the research and analysis products analysed by OIOS, only 12.3 per cent included a separate dissemination budget and 78 per cent did not include any financial resources for dissemination.[37] Nor are human resources allotted strategically for dissemination purposes. According to staff interviewed, when dissemination occurs, it is usually undertaken in an ad hoc manner, for example, as an extra activity during a planned technical cooperation mission. Like other aspects of the Conference's work, dissemination is also undertaken in a decentralized manner (see paras. 32-37 above), with the effect that some divisions have been more adept at mobilizing extrabudgetary funding for such activities and putting in place innovative mechanisms to get their products to target audiences.[38] Also in interviews, staff reported that the exigencies of research and analysis production almost always require those involved in research and analysis to immediately turn to the next project once an existing product is finalized, leaving little time for promotion and dissemination of that product. Surveyed UNCTAD staff cited dissemination as the area that was most in need of being addressed in order to improve the effectiveness of research and analysis products.

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[36] The *World Investment Report* was highlighted in 62 media clippings (20.4 per cent of the sample) and the *Trade and Development Report* in 15 (4.9 per cent). The *Least Developed Countries Report* and the *Economic Development in Africa Report* were mentioned 9 and 4 times respectively (2.9 and 1.3 per cent). The only other, non-flagship titles mentioned were the Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the *Global Investment Trends Monitor* (each eight times).

[37] Dissemination information might vary slightly, since no information was provided for 24 products (8.4 per cent). Of those products for which information was provided (253), mean dissemination budget was $9,994 and median was $5,000.

[38] A cost-effective method of dissemination used by one division has been to tap into already established networks of partners.

43. There have been recent discernible efforts to improve elements of the Conference's communication, such as the use of social media outlets. The UNCTAD website, often the gateway for general audiences searching for research and analysis products, continues to be inadequate despite its overhaul in 2012. For example, the typology of research and analysis products appearing on the web is unsuitable as a vehicle for communicating the Conference's research and analysis work. At present, there are four categories of research and analysis products, resulting in very long lists under each category.[39] There are also inconsistencies where research and analysis categories or an individual product include an introductory overview paragraph explaining the purpose and audience of the product, while others do not. Although some staff and member States recognize improvements with the current website, most agreed that it continued to be unfriendly for users seeking UNCTAD research and analysis products.

44. Interviewed staff and member States also highlighted that the continued production and dissemination of hard copies is important, given limited connectivity in many developing countries.

E. The gender dimensions of trade and development are not consistently mainstreamed into United Nations Conference on Trade and Development research and analysis

45. As requested in the Accra Accord (see para. 173) and reaffirmed in the Doha Mandate, (see para. 56 (n)), since 2008, UNCTAD has sought to incorporate gender into its work. UNCTAD issued a gender mainstreaming strategy in December 2011 and established a substantive UNCTAD gender focal point. Most of the Conference's work on gender is carried out by a trade, gender and development team in the Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities, staffed by two professionals supported by consultants and a general service staff at 50 per cent. UNCTAD has recently produced research and analysis outputs on the linkages between trade, gender and development[40] and teaching materials.[41] It has also implemented technical cooperation projects[42] in order to build the human and institutional capacities of national stakeholders, namely, policymakers and trade practitioners, to mainstream gender in trade policy. In addition, UNCTAD contributes to the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality.

46. Despite this attention to the gender mainstreaming architecture and despite a handful (16 out of a universe of 1,101 products) of gender-specific research and analysis products, gender remains poorly integrated and mainstreamed in the research and analysis pillar as a whole. Gender focal points within each division

[39] The four groupings are: flagships, policy briefs, series and meeting documentation. Policy briefs include 45 documents from 2008 to 2014. The section on "series" has 52 links, each with a long list of documents.

[40] See "Looking at trade policy through a 'gender lens': summary of seven country case studies conducted by UNCTAD", UNCTAD document UNCTAD/DITC/2014/3; *The Least Developed Countries Report 2014* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.14.II.D.7).

[41] Two-volume teaching package on trade and gender disseminated by the Virtual Institute, UNCTAD documents UNCTAD/GDS/2014/1 and UNCTAD/GDS/2014/2.

[42] For example, training of women entrepreneurs within the Empretec programme and the Empretec Women in Business Award.

have not yet been appointed and gender is not systematically included in all divisional workplans.[43] Accordingly, of the products assessed in the OIOS expert review, 90.9 per cent did not address gender. None of the evaluations reviewed by OIOS reviewed between 2010 and 2014, either on technical cooperation projects or subprogrammes 1 and 2, uncovered evidence that the evaluated unit had attempted to systematically incorporate gender into its work.

IV. Conclusion

47. At a broad organizational level, UNCTAD appears to have been successful in its research and analysis pillar on key performance measures during the period under evaluation. Overall, its research and analysis products are of good quality. Both its own stakeholders and external experts unaffiliated with the organization recognize it as relevant and high-value-add in the realm of trade and development. It has executed its large work programme on limited resources. It has made efforts to integrate a gender perspective into its work.

48. Beneath this broad narrative, however, the performance of UNCTAD in the research and analysis pillar is more varied. Although deemed to be "good" on average, individual research and analysis products did differ in their quality and perceived value-add, and there appears to be no relationship between cost and quality: some high-quality products are created at comparatively low cost and vice versa. More fundamentally, UNCTAD has paid little attention to what occurs with its research and analysis products once they are produced. It lacks a stand-alone dissemination strategy to help it to achieve maximum effectiveness through its work, with staff frequently compelled to move on quickly to the next project and paying less attention to communicating the messages emanating from the research and analysis products. Moreover, UNCTAD has invested little in understanding the effectiveness of its research and analysis products. Gender has yet to be substantively integrated into UNCTAD research and analysis products.

49. Underlying the inability of UNCTAD to achieve consistently high effectiveness, efficiency and relevance across its full research and analysis product line is its uncoordinated approach to quality assurance, work planning and production of outputs. Initiatives are under way to address some of these issues, but UNCTAD must accelerate this work if it is to achieve its objectives within its limited resources.

V. Recommendations

50. OIOS makes seven recommendations, all of which it deems to be important according to its criticality rating system.

Recommendation 1 (see paras. 17-18, 20-22, 23-27, 30-37, 40-41, 42-45 and 46-47)

51. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD should accelerate the strengthening of the Conference's institutional orientation towards results by finalizing structural arrangements for membership of the results-based management coordinating group, providing dedicated capacity and clarifying its draft terms of reference, including

[43] See 2013 UNCTAD System-Wide Action Plan report.

the group's overarching objectives and purpose, individual roles and responsibilities, attendance expectations and recommendation and decision-making guidelines.

Indicator of achievement: Production of new or revised documents, followed by their meaningful implementation (for example, regular meetings, well-attended by all divisions, resulting in decisions and actions on key areas of strategic importance)

Recommendation 2 (see paras. 19-27, 32-37 and 44)

52. UNCTAD should revisit its current typology of research and analysis products, ensuring that they reflect largely discrete product lines with key shared features. UNCTAD should use this typology to inform all major strategic decisions, from planning and budgeting to programme implementation and monitoring and evaluation (in accordance with recommendations 1 and 3-7).

Indicator of achievement: Revised research and analysis product typology, used to inform major strategic decisions

Recommendation 3 (see paras. 18 and 32-33)

53. To help to ensure consistent quality standards across the organization, UNCTAD should develop and implement separate quality assurance frameworks for its general (namely, publication-focused) research and analysis product line and its statistics product line, to be applied across all divisions.

Indicator of achievement: Quality assurance frameworks produced, rolled out, used and monitored

Recommendation 4 (see paras. 30-37 and 40-45)

54. To support a more strategic, institution-wide approach to work planning on research and analysis, UNCTAD should reinvigorate the Publications Committee and strengthen its remit. The Committee should undertake a collaborative, interdivisional discussion leading to evidence-based streamlining of the research and analysis workplan by jointly identifying, at a minimum:

- Those products that are most relevant to current and trending knowledge needs in the areas within its mandate
- Those products that are most conducive to making a difference in achieving the objectives of UNCTAD
- What monitoring and evaluation efforts would be most appropriate given a product's risk profile (see recommendation 7)
- Through which format and dissemination strategies each product line will most likely achieve its objectives (see recommendation 5)
- Those research and analysis products of lower relevance to the strategic priorities of UNCTAD, or of lower quality in relation to their cost, that should be reshaped, differently resourced or reconsidered as an institutional priority.

Indicator of achievement: Publications Committee meeting regularly and making concrete recommendations to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on which products

to continue or discontinue based on a critical review of all products along criteria indicated in the recommendation and any other criteria it might wish to use

Recommendation 5 (see paras. 19, 39 and 42-45)

55. In order to achieve maximum results through its research and analysis products, UNCTAD should strengthen its emphasis on the dissemination of these products.

Indicator of achievement: Dissemination strategies are more clearly articulated, resourced, and well-executed, resulting in more strategically targeted dissemination

Recommendation 6 (see paras. 46-47)

56. UNCTAD should reinforce gender mainstreaming in its research and analysis products, namely by:

- Aiming to increase the number of its publications that meaningfully adopt a gender perspective
- Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative gender markers, to the extent possible, into all stages of its quality assurance mechanism, from design to peer review
- Including gender in all divisional workplans and appointing divisional gender focal points with clear roles and responsibilities.

Indicator of achievement: Number of publications meaningfully incorporating a gender perspective increases annually; gender markers incorporated into quality assurance mechanism and divisional workplans, and divisional focal points identified

Recommendation 7 (see paras. 19-27, 38-39 and 47-48)

57. UNCTAD should dedicate focused attention and resources to the monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis results. In keeping with United Nations Evaluation Group normative guidance, this would entail:

- Creation of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the organization
- Development of a risk-based evaluation plan, identifying which research and analysis products require individualized evaluation and which might be adequately covered by a product line-based approach, and accompanied by a resource mobilization plan for ensuring adequate evaluation coverage of the pillar.

Indicator of achievement: Monitoring and evaluation framework produced, followed by production of risk-based evaluation plan, with both indicating how United Nations Evaluation Group guidance has been incorporated

(*Signed*) Carman L. **Lapointe**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

17 March 2015

Annex*

Response by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development management to the evaluation

1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and his senior management team would like to express their appreciation to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for the efforts in undertaking the present evaluation. The recommendations will be used to sharpen the ongoing efforts to enhance the work of the UNCTAD secretariat.

2. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD acknowledges the confirmation in the report of the Conference's institutional relevance, quality and development perspective in its research and analysis. Although the evaluation and its recommendations cover mainly the research and policy pillar of the UNCTAD secretariat, efforts for implementation of the relevance and impact aspects will need to be undertaken with due regard of the other two pillars of the Conference's work, namely, technical assistance and intergovernmental consensus-building. In this manner, the interlinkages and synergies within the pillars could be maintained and reinforced.

3. The Secretary-General takes note of the issues raised by OIOS concerning the need to devote appropriate resources and attention to internal coordination, dissemination, the mainstreaming of gender and follow-up efforts, including on assessing impact. Indeed, these constitute longstanding institutional challenges in the work of UNCTAD, and the contribution by OIOS in providing an independent and impartial view is valuable for the way forward. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD is already devoting important attention to internal coordination, communication and the mainstreaming of results-based management into the work of UNCTAD, as had been announced to the Trade and Development Board in September 2014.

4. Against this background, the Secretary-General wishes to make the following three observations:

Implementation constraints

5. There are important political and budgetary constraints to the implementation of the report's recommendations. For instance, it should be noted that the UNCTAD programme of work, including publications, is carefully scrutinized by member States through the intergovernmental machinery and that it is the result of negotiations among member States. Hence, while work on improving quality and coherence is under way, changes in the typology and nature of publications can be implemented only to a certain extent without involving member States. In terms of resources, establishing a full-fledged framework for following up and assessing the impact of UNCTAD publications will have resource implications.

* In the present annex, OIOS presents the full text of the comments from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. This practice has been instituted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

Gender mainstreaming

6. The report recognizes the important efforts made within the UNCTAD secretariat following the relevant mandates from the General Assembly and the twelfth and thirteenth ministerial conferences of UNCTAD. The secretariat wishes to note, however, that a number of recent outputs related to gender mainstreaming in most of the key areas of UNCTAD have not been reflected in the report. For example, the *Least Developed Countries Report 2014* contains a specific proposal for enhancing women's non-farming activities. The same holds true for the series of country-case studies on the impact of trade policy on women's well-being and economic empowerment, the work on gender and information and communications technology, gender and foreign investment, and women entrepreneurship.

7. Against this background, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD welcomes the recommendation for further mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the research and analysis work of UNCTAD, as elaborated in an action plan.

Coherence of messages in major publications

8. The Secretary-General welcomes the findings of global recognition, excellent quality and influential character of some of the Conference's major publications and takes note of the issues in respect of the coherence of messages raised by OIOS. Indeed, it is recognized that UNCTAD must respond to the persistent development questions of our time in a coherent manner. Nevertheless, in doing so, an appropriate level of flexibility needs to be achieved to remain responsive to more specific mandates and to the emerging needs of the Conference's stakeholders. In support of striking such a balance, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD continues to revitalize the Publications Committee and will entrust the new Deputy Secretary General of UNCTAD with overseeing this important work as UNCTAD moves towards a more coherent approach to research and analysis. The Secretary-General expects that, through a robust application of a set of best practices, which includes closer coordination and peer reviews, the inconsistencies and contradictions in the Conference's messages will be gradually reduced.

9. The actions initially foreseen to implement the recommendations of the present report are outlined in an action plan. These actions are expected to complement and create synergies with the ongoing initiatives of the UNCTAD secretariat in line with the culture of continuous improvement promoted by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD.